

Washington, DC – *Speech of Congressman Mike Honda (CA-15), Chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), before immigration rally of Asian American and Pacific Islander organizations on Capitol Hill:*

**AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY**

"I'm honored to join you today in this celebration of the American spirit, in celebration of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. Many of you have flown into DC from all over the country.&nbsp; Thank you for being here. And thank you for making your voices heard. As we celebrate our heritage, we pay tribute to the hardships and barriers overcome by each generation of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) and to our hopes and aspirations as we contribute to the prosperity of this nation.

"In 2005, close to 9 million of the nation's foreign-born were born in Asia, making up about a quarter of the foreign born population, and over one half of the total AAPI population. This is why immigration reform is such a top priority in our community. As Chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, it is a top priority for our Caucus as well. Let's face it, immigrants make this country stronger.&nbsp; They always have – it is a part of the American story. To do justice to this history, we need a real solution to our immigration problem. We need a comprehensive approach that is just and humane. And we need it now.

"Some in our nation's capital are working hard to instill fear throughout this land built by immigrants. They are working hard to keep human beings illegal. But it is not a crime to make a better life for your family, is it? It is not a crime to roll up your sleeves, to earn an honest living and pay taxes. It is not a crime to finish school and want to contribute to America. You know what they call that? It's called the American Dream. These are the values that built this country, and these are the values that you represent today.&nbsp;

"Asian American and Pacific Islander communities are sometimes forgotten in this debate. It is not talked about, but there are roughly 1.5 million Asian undocumented immigrants living, working, or studying in the U.S., including victims of immigration fraud, who have become undocumented due to no fault of their own. Many work and study hard, they pay taxes, yet live in fear with no hope of gaining a path to legal permanent resident status. Let's give these workers and students an opportunity.&nbsp;

"Family reunification is also extremely important in our communities. Immigration reform must espouse the family values that are so fundamental to our national ideals. Family members provide care for the sick, children, and the elderly. Family members are crucial for small businesses and educational opportunities. Close to 2 million in our communities wait years, sometimes even decades, in order to reunite with their families in the United States. I recently heard a story about a Filipino man, Arcadio Basat, an 81 year old naturalized U.S. citizen, who fought for America during World War II. He filed a petition for his sons in 1992, and he is still waiting! That is fifteen years of waiting to share a life with his children, of waiting to be a father. And his story is not uncommon.&nbsp;

"What we need now is comprehensive immigration reform. What does that mean? It means respecting the dignity of immigrants. It means not tearing families apart, but reuniting mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, sisters and brothers. It means an earned path to citizenship for hardworking, taxpaying immigrants. It means providing undocumented students a chance to pursue higher education and contribute to our economy. The time is now for Congress to be serious about a real solution to our immigration problem. The time is now to put people before politics."